

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCATE  
505 HUDSON STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106

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State Victim Advocate

**Testimony of Michelle Cruz, State Victim Advocate  
Submitted to the Appropriations Committee  
Monday, February 23, 2009**

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA).

The OVA is mandated to evaluate the delivery of services to crime victims; receive complaints from crime victims regarding their treatment within the criminal justice system; recommend changes in legislation and policy to advance the rights of crime victims; and conduct programs of public education and outreach. Often times, the OVA is the agency of last resort for crime victims with the authority to file a special limited appearance in any court proceeding to advocate for a crime victim's right. Additionally, the OVA has the authority to conduct an investigation regarding the services provided to crime victims, or lack thereof, and/or the treatment experienced by crime victims throughout the criminal justice process.

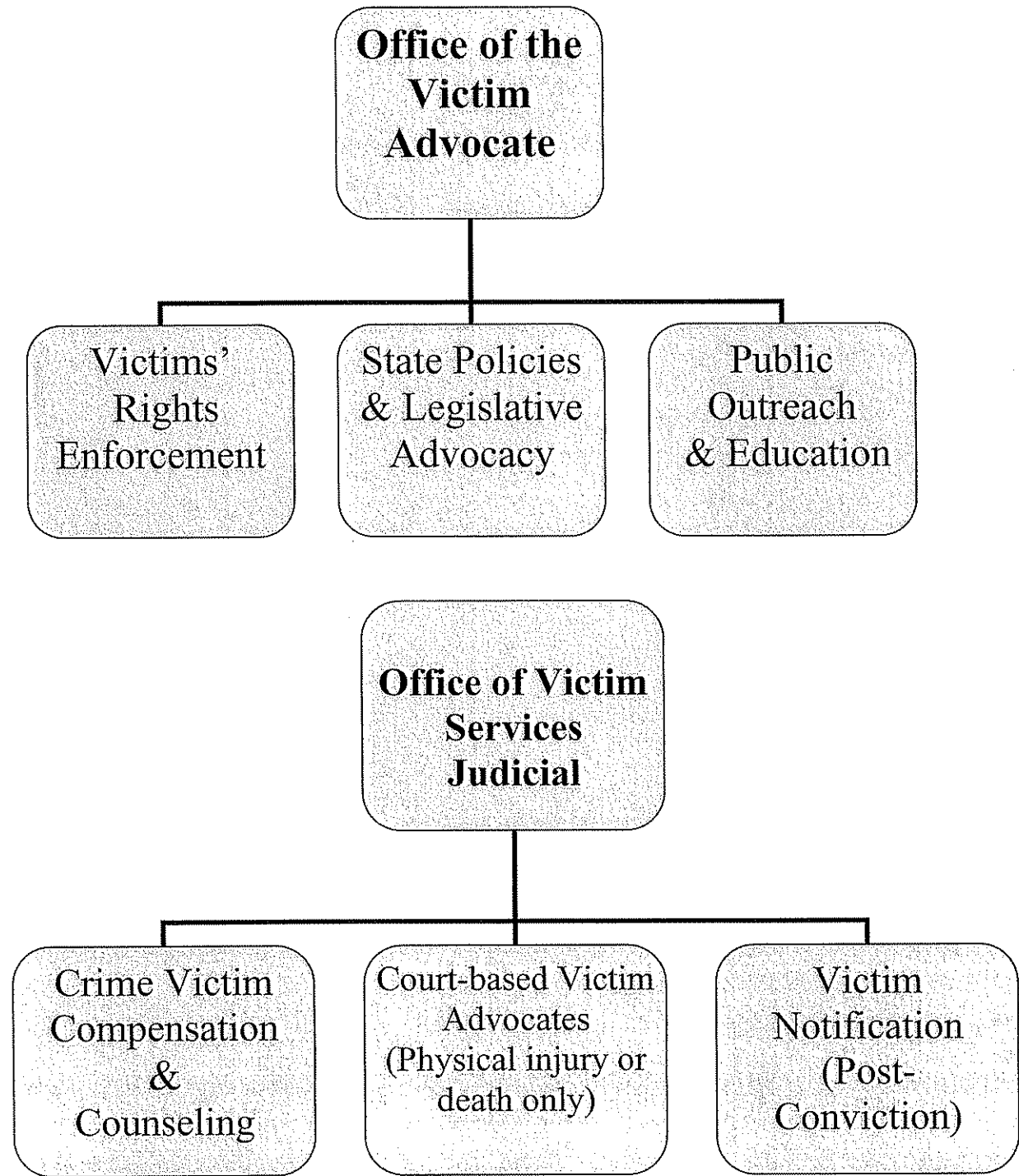
There are four (4) full time staff positions, including the State Victim Advocate. In addition, the OVA has one (1) part time Office Assistant. The OVA has also utilized two (2) college interns during this fiscal period. At this time, the OVA would traditionally submit an office expansion proposal for your consideration. However, the OVA is intimately familiar with the fiscal crisis that the state is facing and has instead taken a number of steps to reduce costs within the office. For example, the OVA is in the process of partnering with the Board of Pardons and Paroles for Westlaw Service. This service is a critical tool for the OVA in obtaining legal and legislative research and will be reduced by partnering with another agency in need of the same services.

The OVA receives more than 900 calls a year from crime victims, or others on their behalf. Each call requires personal attention from the OVA staff for the affects experienced by crime victims are unique and vary. There is no "one solution answer" for the harms experienced by crime victims. The OVA spends a great deal of time educating crime victims and identifying their individual needs. The OVA is not the direct service provider; the Office of Victim Services (OVS), Judicial Branch, is the state's lead agency for providing direct services to crime victims but, unfortunately, only those victims who have sustained physical injury or death. Although the OVA does intervene in individual cases to advocate for victims' rights, the OVA does not generally provide the services that are available to crime victims through the OVS.

Below is a graphic to assist you in understanding the significant differences between the OVA and the OVS. The OVA, unlike the OVS, does not limit its services to assisting victims of physical injury. At this time, crime victims that have not sustained physical injury or death are

the most vulnerable through the criminal justice process for they are not afforded a victim advocate from the OVS.

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE OFFICE OF THE VICTIM ADVOCATE AND THE OFFICE OF VICTIM SERVICES?



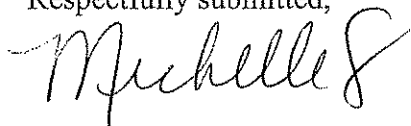
The OVA, in an attempt to reach a greater population regarding important victim rights information, has published and distributed its first quarterly newsletter, "Victims' Voice." The newsletter is filled with information, resources, upcoming events and articles of interest. The printing was done exclusively by the OVA and was distributed to all police departments, town offices, the general assembly, state agencies, victim service providers and members that subscribed through the on-line subscription. Distribution was mainly done by email. The OVA has had an overwhelming positive response from agencies as well as the public.

The OVA has also submitted a proposal to the UCONN School of Law to conduct a course in Victimology in the Fall of 2009 and a formalized externship program to begin in the Spring of 2010. The long term goal of this project would be to establish a Crime Victim Law Clinic at the UCONN School of Law.

I have been in this position now for fifteen months. Since that time, I have travelled around the state to meet and develop strong relationships with various criminal justice professionals and others providing services to victims of crime. I have also visited numerous community organizations, colleges, universities and high schools around the state to inform them about victims' rights and services. My primary goal, as the State Victim Advocate, is to improve the delivery of services to crime victims and bring the victims' voices to the forefront of the criminal justice system.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify and would welcome any questions that you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michelle Cruz".

Michelle Cruz, Esq.  
State Victim Advocate